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ABSTRACT

The New Zealand early childhood center charter is a contract between the Ministry of Education and an individual center. The charter was introduced with the 1989 publication of the "Early Childhood Management Handbook." It was thought to be the key to improving quality in services, since it outlined official center policies, philosophies, and characteristics. However, the handbook, which was actually a purple folder containing the charter guidelines, came to be known as the "purple people-eater." This paper examines the pros and cons of the handbook's and charter's introduction through a study of the experiences of different early childhood centers, and the perceptions of staff, management, and parents. Findings from a research project called "Quality in Early Education and Care: A Study of Charter Development Processes and Outcomes," which analyzed information from 10 early childhood centers (4 kindergartens, 4 child care centers, and 2 play center) are reported. Discussion covers the confusion over center conformity; decision-making structures; consultation with parents and other groups; relations between staff, management, and parents; and social and philosophical challenges. Issues related to external support, costs, and accountability are also discussed. Several problems experienced in the charter development are summarized. For full benefit, it is concluded, centers need more time, less pressure, more advisory and resource support, and greater freedom to define "high quality" and ways to achieve it. Contains 23 references. (LB)

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Paper Presented to the Fifth Early Childhood Convention, Dunedin. September 1991

A "Purple People-Eater" or Quality Assurance Mechanism? The 1989/90 Early Childhood Centre Charter Requirements

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The early childhood centre "charter", officially introduced with the publication of the "Early Childhood Management Handbook" in 1989, was thought to be "the key to improving quality" in services (Meade, 1990, p.7). However, the Handbook which was in fact a purple folder containing the charter guidelines, soon assumed an alias within the early childhood field of the "Purple People-Eater" . This paper examines the positives and negatives of its introduction through study of the experiences of different early childhood centres and the perceptions of staff, management, and parents.

A "charter" is defined as a contract between the Ministry of Education and the individual centre, drawn up through consultation with parents and the community. Charter documents contain an outline of centre policies, philosophies, and characteristics. They are required to specify in what ways and how the individual centre intends to work towards providing standards of higher quality than the minimum licensing level The charter is a quality assurance mechanism for the government. The funding of individual centres from Vote:Education is linked to the development and approval of charters with the Ministry according to the level of quality the government is prepared to support.

It should be noted that individual centres had to comply with minimum licensing standards before they could negotiate their charter with the Ministry of Education. Details about both the minimum licensing requirements (required to operate) and the higher standard charter requirements (not required but necessary to obtain funding) had not been finalized and officially promulgated at the time that centres were expected to prepare their charter.

PS 020301

Introduction

Background

In early 1988 a working party on early childhood care and education was established and chaired by Dr. Anne Meade. Their report, called *"Education to be More"*, argued that the government should be concerned about quality assurance and should provide incentives for high quality, accessible, and affordable early childhood services in all communities.

To achieve this, they recommended the State should provide funding to the providers of early education services rather than to the parents. This would give the State the ability to have greater control over centre quality; through setting up a process(s) to make centres accountable to them

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It was proposed that another way for the government to influence quality was through the setting of national standards. The Meade Committee considered that licensing regulations for all services should be introduced and compliance made mandatory. They further recommended that centres have a charter, based on National Guidelines to be set by Government.

In February 1989, the Labour government's policies for early education were released in a booklet called *"Before Five"*. The policy statement broadly followed the Meade Committee's recommendations. The "Before Five: National Guidelines, Charters, and Licences Working Group" was formed to draft the minimum standards for licensing legislation and also to formulate the national guidelines for charters and approval procedures. The *"Early Childhood Management Handbook"* (hereafter called the Handbook) was developed from this and distributed to centres during October/November.

On 1 October 1989 the Department of Education was replaced by four education agencies: The Ministry of Education, The Education Review Office, The Early Childhood Development Unit, and the Special Education Service. The implementation unit for the reform of education administration instructed kindergartens, playcentres and childcare centres that if they wished to receive government funding through Vote: Education they had until 1 July 1990 to develop and negotiate a charter with the Ministry. The Ministry's time-line for charter approval was affected by not being able to first license centres, as the legislation for this was not passed until September 1990. The Statement of Desirable Objectives and Practices was gazetted on 6 December 1990, and the deadline for charter approval was put back to 1 March 1991, and then again to 30 June 1991.

Possible implications for quality promotion and assurance in early childhood services

The guidelines for charter development contained in the Handbook make no distinction between services traditionally perceived to provide care and those categorised as educational. An artificial dichotomy between the care and education components of the early childhood programme is well argued in the New Zealand literature (May, 1985; Smith & Swain, 1988). Researchers have shown that kindergartens and playcentres and childcare centres all provide both care and education (Meade, 1985; Smith, 1988). Now, both types of services are required to detail their educational and care components in order to receive increased funding on a more equitable formula. An implication is that the status of the childcare service and ultimately of the field as a whole should be raised which in turn may have positive consequences for children, families, and staff through greater cohesion and co-ordination between services.

Linking government funding to charter development seems to be an incentive and enticement for centres to raise their standards as high as they individually can. Whereas minimum licensing standards help to ensure that all centres have the same minimum floor of quality, the main idea behind the introduction of charters seems to be to encourage centres to work towards providing the best they can in what areas they value and see room to improve on. This can only be positive, because as May (1991) comments, even a number of the basic licensing regulations need to be strengthened in some centres.

Financial accountability for government funding is one main reason for introducing the concept of the charter. Accountability is considered critical to ensure service quality (May, 1991; Meade, 1988). Centres are, in the main, small, autonomous, self-contained settings, where participants all know one another and one or a small group of people tend to take responsibility for financial management and decision-making with few if any mechanisms set up to be accountable to parents and staff. Most early education centres have had little experience of opening their doors, programmes, and administration records to officials.

Meade (1990) explains that because a charter is a contract between the community and the centre, as well as between the centre and the government, it "sets in train some of the processes that are valuable for child and family well-being" (p.7). For such good and desired things to occur early childhood services need to be 'nested' in a wider support system, including:

> "in-service training administrative support, licensing standards and personnel who support the programme [not undermine it] (Meade, 1991, p.4)".

Her views reflect Bronfenbrenner's (1979) thesis that different systems and the interrelationships between these systems have an impact on children's development (for example: the family, the early childhood centre, the community, and government organizations).

An intention underpining the concept of the charter seems to be to foster communication and collaboration between centre, home, and community settings. This could support devolution of power and decision-making from early childhood organizations and employers to individual staff members, parents, and the community in which each centre is contained.

Researchers have demonstrated that when there is good communication and understanding of expectations between parents and staff an optimal level of continuity between home and early childhood centre environments is more likely to be experienced by children (Powell, 1989; Smith & Swain, 1988). Educational philosophers point out that parents do have a right to participate in educational decision-making (Forster, 1989). Cook (1982) advocates that:

> "Parents must overcome feelings that the centre is providing a service for which they must feel grateful ... and not criticize. As the centre operates for your children you have a right and a duty to participate in decisions on how it should operate".

An important component of good-quality programmes is the nature of staff-management relations. The importance of flexibility in leadership style, shared decision-making and consensus among staff on programme aims and practices has been demonstrated (Smith, McMillan, Kennedy & Ratcliffe, 1989; Jorde-Bloom, 1986).

The community can gain from involvement in educational decision-making (Bibby, 1985). For example, ethnic minority groups who try to have some impact on the education of their children, whether they are parents or not, are likely to affect outcomes that are empowering for their culture.

Problems may however be encountered in trying to foster closer relationships between centre, home, and community for the purposes of consultation on charter content and shared involvement in charter development. Childcare centres are less likely than kindergartens and playcentres to serve their immediate areas (Royal Commission on Social Policy, 1987). Community consultation may therefore be of less importance and relevance for childcare centres. Lack of parent commitment and expertise for serving on centre committees are two issues noted in the New Zealand literature (Meade, 1981; Renwick, 1988). Smith (1986) reports that parents were found to form closer relationships with staff in childcare centres than in kindergartens. She suggests a number of reasons for this, including: better staff/child ratios and children tend to enter childcare younger and spend more hours in their centre. Staff ability to establish relationships with parents can be affected by the amount of time that they have to communicate with parents during the day, the nature of staff pre- and in-service training courses, and personal factors such as experience and maturity (Renwick, 1988; Smith, 1986).

A social agenda seems to underpin the charter guidelines. Some of the principles are more philosophical and socio-political in nature and do not seem to be characteristic of the beliefs and practices of most early childhood practitioners. How staff and management will react to the principle, for example, that "children with special needs and their families are entitled to have their individual and special needs catered for ..." and the requirement that "children with special needs will be taught in the same setting as other children", should be interesting given that centres tend not to have special needs children and those that do such as some kindergartens tend to have them as a special group within the programme.

Consciousness raising may occur through consideration of the principles in the charter guidelines. Efforts to consult and document what the individual centre is about in relation to the principles and requirements could be change-oriented (Kells, 1983). The processes and possibilities identified and discussed may excite management, staff, and parents and lead to philosophical and physical changes in centres. This however, would depend upon perceptions of the purpose of the charter exercise. If external forces, such as pressures from the Ministry or threats of loss of funding, are the primary motivation, then it seems more likely that the charter exercise will be a just a (bureaucratic) task to be preformed rather than change-oriented at the philosophical and practice levels.

According to Meade (1990) early childhood staff tend not to do enough self-reflection and seem to give insufficient recognition to the value of self-conscious practice. To develop a charter as outlined in the Handbook, staff are required to reflect on and document their goals, aims, and practices. Consultation with parents and community will provide feedback which should result in self-evaluation, further reflection, and the introduction of positive improvements. Research suggests a link between staff engaging in self-conscious practice and the quality of children's experiences (Meade, 1985; 1991).

The Research Project *

A project on "Quality in Early Education and Care: A study of Charter Development Processes and Outcomes", funded by the Ministry of Education and based at the University of Otago, was carried out in the Otago region.

Preliminary discussions and meetings were held with government officials, representatives of early childhood organizations, and management of centres selected for study in late 1989. Background information was collected and full data collection commenced when centres opened for the new year in 1990.

Ten early childhood centres that differed in characteristics such as type of management, location, roll-size, and adult-child ratio, participated: four kindergartens, four childcare centres, and two playcentres.

A collaborative research approach was taken. The researcher observed (and at times even assisted) at centre charter meetings and had discussions and individual meetings with various participants. Three joint meetings of representatives (parent and staff/management) from the centres were held at the University. These meetings were held at strategic points during the charter development process: March (by which time most had started to look at charter preparation), June (when they had prepared their draft charter), and November (when they could now reflect on the process). The meetings were designed to provide opportunities for participants to share experiences, learn from each other and give feedback on the findings of this research project as the information was being gathered and written-up.

Main Findings

Conformity or Support of Differences Between Centres?

Confusion was evident as to whether individuality in charters was possible. This was because despite Ministry rhetoric about charters being a description of the practices and philosophies of the individual centre and the centre's management plans for achieving standards of higher quality over time, the principles in each section of the *Handbook* were stated by the Ministry to be mandatory and management plans had to cover these. A double message was contained in the Ministry's (1990) statement that:

> "As long as the principle of each charter statement is addressed in the individual management plan, it may be expressed differently by different centres".

There was general recognition across all types of centres in this study that:

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* A more detailed description of the project, including methodology, sample, and research procedures is available from the presenter or from the Ministry of Education. Please see the presenter's note at the end of this paper.

(i) What was written in the final draft charter was written to "please the Ministry". "A lot of it is just looking at what is written in the handbook and writing something similar" (director, Centre J), and of "**formulating the descriptions and documenting what we do**" (director Centre I),

(ii) "It seems like we have to pretend to consult when so much of the charter is laid down anyway" (director, Centre H). "What say the parents all want something in the curriculum that's not allowed: Do you just bow down to the Ministry and word the charter round the corner and round the bend" (president, Centre A),

(iii) "The Ministry gave a new meaning to 'negotiate'. We have to negotiate. They don't have to" (head teacher, Centre C). "If we want the new funding we must toe the party line" (president, Centre A),

(iv) "We're probably all going to have quite similar wording such as 'providing a warm and secure environment for the children to be in'" (head teacher, Centre D).

Decision-Making Structures

Writing the charter document was mainly the responsibility of managers, including charter committees and/or staff. Power structures within centres seemed little altered as a consequence of the exercise, and final decisions were made by management, and by the associations responsible for the kindergartens and playcentres in this study. The kindergarten and playcentre associations provided their centres with specific guidelines (framework) on what charters should contain, and checked their charters before they were submitted to the Ministry. The proprietor of a private childcare centre who usually made most decisions wrote her centre's charter and then provided staff and parents with copies for their comments and approval. In contrast a proprietor of another private childcare centre who was also supervisor of the centre and seemed to have a more consultative approach to decision-making involved her staff in drafting charter statements.

Consultation

At all centres, parents were requested more than once to attend charter meetings or to be involved in the process in some way. This contrasted with attempts to consult with individuals and groups in the community who were usually not approached a second time if lack of interest of unwillingness to participate was shown. Consultation with parents was regarded as much more of a priority than consultation with the community. At four centres though (three childcare centres and one kindergarten) carrying out community consultation was considered to be problematic. Their definition of community was a 'neighbourhood' yet their centres drew families from a wide area or from many different areas which made, they thought, community consultation logistically very difficult and an unreal task to ask of them.

At the June combined centre meeting for this research project the representatives were asked to discuss how fruitful they had found consultation with various groups and to provide a rating for their centre on a four-point scale of "most useful" to "not useful". Table 1 shows that centre representatives consistently reported that parents were the most useful group to consult with followed by Maori advisers/groups. Consultation with people in their neighbourhood (public), primary schools and businesses, was considered to have been least useful.

At the playcentres (Centres A & B) parent consultation was found to be "useful". It was "most useful" at three kindergartens and "useful" at the fourth. Parent consultation was "most useful" at the institutional-based childcare centre, "useful" at a private childcare centre, and "slightly useful" at the community childcare centre (Centres H, I, and J). The supervisor at the second private childcare centre reported that "what little input parents gave" had been "useful".

Of the centres whose staff or charter subcommittees sought the assistance of Maori advisers and people in their community their help was "most useful" at a kindergarten, "useful" at a playcentre, two kindergartens, and one childcare centre, and "slightly useful" at the fourth kindergarten. Contact with people in the neighbourhood (i.e. public) was either "slightly useful" or "not useful" at the centres where public involvement had been sought. Consultation with teachers and principals of primary schools was "most useful" at one kindergarten, "useful" at a second kindergarten and "slightly useful" at a third kindergarten, one childcare centre and one playcentre. Consultation with local businesses was "slightly useful" and "not useful", at a childcare centre and kindergarten, respectively.

TABLE 1.

The reported usefulness of centre consultation with various groups about their charters

(4 = most useful, 3 = useful, 2 = slightly useful, 1 = not useful)

CENTRE	PARENTS	PUBLIC COMMUNITY	MAORI	SCHOOLS	BUSINESSES
A	3	-	-	2	-
B	3	2	3	-	-
C	3	2	2	-	-
D	4	2	3	4	-
E	4	1	3	2	1
F	4	2	4	3	-
G	2	-	-	-	-
H	3	-	-	-	-
I	4	2	3	2	2
J	2	-	-	-	-

Up to 16 different methods of consultation were employed. Kindergartens and playcentres used a greater variety of ways on average than the childcare centres. Carrying out consultation was not found to be easy. At one childcare centre, for example, the director and staff, feeling disillusioned with the lack of parent feedback, decided that "no comment" indicated parent consent. The low response rate to questionnaires surprised the kindergarten teachers. As one head teacher said, "they required continual jollying along from us"

Problems included: negative feedback, and parent apathy particularly in terms of attendance at formal meetings and responses to surveys. Here is a sample of comments from staff and managers relating to the difficulty of parent consultation:

> "It takes a lot of parents a long time to get used to a place before they get the confidence to join in" (Centre F)
>
> "We hear the comment of: my children won't be here when it's in place so why should I be involved?" (Centre C)

> "People are equating our meetings with those of the school boards of trustees. They just don't want to put themselves in such a position where they are involved to a large extent (Centre H).
>
> "Our Maori parents felt overwhelmed by being asked to help with the Treaty section. They said we come from the North Island and we don't know very much about our culture" (Centre A)

Some ingenious techniques and variations to the usual methods of consultation helped to encourage involvement in the consultative process. For example, some centres organized social occasions. It was not possible for in-depth charter discussion to take place at these gatherings, but they nevertheless gave sub-committee members/managers and staff an opportunity (although it was usually brief) to "raise the matter of the charter with as many parents as possible at one time". One kindergarten had "... a children's fun-day barbecue with the charter dribbling around the outside". Another kindergarten sub-committee organized a fish 'n child evening to "... throw the charter at them by surprise". A playcentre held a public meeting at the local hotel with supper provided because "... you've got to bribe people to make them come").

A childcare centre director believed that a high parent response rate to a survey was achieved due to the use of a personal, here and now approach of asking each parent as they entered the centre to complete the survey before leaving.

At kindergarten and playcentre meetings the possibility (or "threat") that government funding might be discontinued was frequently mentioned. At all centres the shortage of time or urgency for completing the charter was used as an argument to ensure and encourage commitment to and involvement in the process.

Staff-Management-Parent Relations

Some parents and staff (especially new staff) learnt about and developed a greater understanding of their centre's philosophy and practices though the consultative process. For example one kindergarten teacher reported that:

> "A parent wrote in to say that she hadn't realised those procedures existed and so that's a really positive side of writing the charter" (Centre D).

Managers and staff learnt more about parent and community views. Questionnaires and surveys were useful for indicating how parents and community members viewed the centres, their programmes, and what they needed more information about. Some parent criticisms indicated a need to provide educational material or to plan parent education seminars. At one kindergarten, for example, a parent had written that sand clogged up her washing machine and the cost for repairs was $30.00. The parent questioned whether there was any need for a sand-pit at the kindergarten! - much to the teachers' amusement. At the playcentres, communication amongst parents was enhanced through the increased opportunity provided by the consultative process to air their criticisms and to clarify concerns. At the childcare centres, the requirement to consult was believed to have led to some improvements in three-way communication between managers, staff and parents.

At all the centres, positive feedback, when this was given, was affirming for staff who usually received little supportive feedback from parents. A theme that often arose in discussions about the consultative process was that improved communication was important to foster because this would help to eradicate what staff and management perceived as parent misunderstandings and concerns that need not be.

The kindergarten teachers found that consultation tended to be of greater benefit to the parents themselves rather than affecting much of what was written in the charter. A few teachers expressed surprise that parents had concerns about their programmes. As a result of feedback some changes were made that teachers might not have considered according to their professional views, or perhaps would not thought of doing had parents not made the suggestions. For example, at one kindergarten most parents were found to believe that the teachers did not need to home-visit children and families. The teachers thought about this and reported back that they will now do home visits at the parents request or if they want to follow-up on a problem with a particular child.

Social/Philosophical Challenges

A childcare proprietor pointed out the meaningless in practice of some statements which charters were expected to contain. For example about the statement that staff should ensure that meal and snack times are an enjoyable occasion, she asked:

> "If some kids wake up at snack time very grumpy is it our fault? or if they don't like what's being served?"

The most contentious charter principles and requirements were those relating to the Handbook sections on the Treaty of Waitangi and Special Needs. People generally agreed in principle with the intentions underlying these requirements. This was probably because people realised that:

> "... in most areas we had little choice in the actual adoption of concepts such as equity or Treaty of Waitangi. If we want the new funding we must toe the party line" (Centre A).

It was the practical implementation of the requirements that was of concern and debate. For example, parent-staff discussion at many centres was recorded on the need for resources and support services to be available before special needs children could be accepted. For many parents the introduction of taha Maori and bicultural practices in the programme was not deemed to be important or relevant because most or all children enroled were Pakeha or European, or from other ethnic groups.

The principle of 'Equity' was also debated, but only because it seemed that many staff and parents were not sure of its meaning and confused it with biculturalism. The exercise of charter writing was of educational value to the participants who sought clarifications of concepts used in the Handbook. For example, the distinction between "programme" and "curriculum" was discussed at one childcare centre charter meeting.

External Support

Most centre representatives were annoyed with the concentrated and 'undue' pressure placed on them to prepare a charter for negotiation by 1st July, especially since the legislation for this had yet to be passed. Feelings of being let down, anger, and powerlessness were reported when the date (at the eleventh hour) for charter negotiation was extended. They were annoyed that some areas they had worked on, such as the Treaty of Waitangi section, were no longer necessary for chartering or were rumoured to be changing due to a change in government. They had worked hard, received no feedback, and nothing happened in the way that they had believed it would. As one head kindergarten teacher complained:

> "I feel it's all been rather an anti-climax. We rushed with our charter and then what happens? The Ministry hasn't even looked at it. They put the pressure on us and it's turned out to be needless" (Centre F)

Another head kindergarten teacher said:

> "Looking back on it, it was a relatively simple exercise. If it were taken slower and more organized..." (Centre E)

Some centre representatives suggested that the Ministry and the Early Childhood Development Unit could have provided more "pats on the back" and guidance to reduce stress and uncertainty about whether what they were doing, was right.

Centres received some conflicting, and at times difficult to understand instructions. This was a "sore point" amongst people at all ten centres. Requirements for chartering were open to interpretation. Advice from different agencies and government organizations was being given along the lines of "We think you will have to...", or "Although we said ... you now have to ...". As one kindergarten parent reported it was generally felt that this was "a terrible waste of our energy".

Some Costs of Charter Preparation

Most participants did not appear to enjoy their involvement or the challenge of it. Comments such as "I'm sick of the whole topic of the charter" were often heard at meetings especially towards the end of the process. Participants spent copious hours carrying out consultation and drafting their centre's charter over a relatively short period of time (three to six months depending upon when preparation started). They encountered considerable work: reading and communicating with each other what the requirements for writing a charter were; attending Association level meetings and ECDU in-service courses; carrying out consultation; attending and preparing for centre meetings; and assisting with or drafting their charter.

A playcentre parent wrote a letter to the Minister of Education expressing concern about the time-frame for chartering and the effects it was having on her and other families. She said that her "house was a mess" because of the time that was required to be invested in helping to prepare her playcentre's charter. She explained that parents already gave large amounts of their time, through attending monthly Parent Council meetings and parent helping.

At the playcentres, parent education and children's activities were affected by the time that parents and supervisors invested in charter preparation. Significant disruptions to kindergarten and childcare centre programmes did not seem to occur. This seemed to have been because not all teachers, staff, and parents were involved or played a major part in consulting and organizing meetings. However at the playcentres, all parents belong to their Parents Council and played a more or less direct part in charter development in addition to their usual centre commitments.

Charter preparation resulted in some upheaval in centre administration. A massive amount of additional paperwork was created for managers and staff. The normal management meetings were affected, as was the ability of most managers/directors to focus on their usual tasks.

It proved to be a financially costly exercise.. A bone of contention, raised with a Ministry Liaison Officer by some people at the March research meeting, was that unlike school trustees they did not receive payment or reimbursement of travel expenses from the government. Consultation and charter production was an expensive undertaking in terms of: the unpaid time it took, the time that could have been used for other centre related and personal tasks, and the financial costs incurred such as for photocopying.

Accountability

There is now greater consciousness amongst parents, staff and managers of regulations and the government's ability to have an impact on administration and programme practices. There is general recognition across the centres though that what is stated in charters and what is actually done in practice can be two different things because of the difficulty faced by officials in checking for this.

Management and staff recognise that parents can hold them accountable to what is stated in their charter. However, charter development does not appear to have resulted in greater actual accountability to parents, apart from helping to open up the channels of communication and enhance centre-parent relations. Some staff suggested that the charter document can be useful to fall back on in discussions with parents who want them to do something that they believe should not be done. At some charter meetings it was observed that parents do not always seem to want or think that greater accountability of management to them is possible. Moreover, some parents indicated that they do not believe that they are qualified to make critical appraisals:

> "Well, you teachers know best",
>
> "Surely its not up to us say",
>
> "We'll leave it to you to write up what you do".

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Was the charter the key to improving quality that it was hoped it would be? It did set in train some processes that are critical for promoting quality such as Meade (1990) suggests. But a number of problems related to the policy and the lack of public relations work on it before its introduction were experienced. This meant that it did not have as many or as significant benefits (over the year of study) as hypothesized from the literature reviewed.

Centre practices and programme philosophies were documented and this encouraged managers and staff to engage in self-reflection. Most staff and managers seemed to work hard to try to obtain parent feedback during and after drafting the charter. This lead to greater communication by parents with staff and managers from their perspectives as consumers and children's primary educators/carers. It helped to alert staff, managers and parents to each others views and understandings about the early childhood programme.

Only in the playcentres did most parents sit down with staff and decide what was important for children's learning and development (it happened to a lesser extent at a kindergarten and childcare centre). Yet, this often happens anyway for other purposes in playcentre because of the nature of the organisation.

Much of what people in the ten centres wrote for their charter was based little on consultation and shared decision-making within centres. Charter content was in the end shaped essentially by: the guidelines in the Handbook, the framework of appropriate charter statements provided by the local kindergarten and playcentre associations, the policies of committees and individual managers/proprietors, and the staff's professional knowledge and usual practices.

It was difficult to assess if centres had raised their standards, as May (1991) suggests is needed, because at the same time all centres were working towards meeting various new proposed minimum licensing standards. Increased awareness of accountability was evidenced through concerns (of even the private childcare proprietors) to ensure that parents commented on and approved their charter. Awareness that government was concerned and interested in the quality of services through its officials was also evidenced.

The main problems experienced in charter development were:

(i) learning what the concept of consultation meant, defining who constituted the community and who was important to consult with,

(ii) parents perception of their ability or need to be involved,

(iii) the urgency of needing to learn and understand the terminology and details in the Handbook, which lead to wasted time in discussions/arguments to clarify,

(iv) considerable work overload in centres to the expense of some things that usually happen in centres, such as parent education programmes and the time that parents and staff/management had to do other out-side-of centre things,

(v) emotional strain and financial costs which discourages future willingness to be involved in such a process,

(vi) development of mistrust for government agencies and officials because of conflicting views, changing rules, deadlines, and requirements,

(vii) confusion over requirements due to differences in interpretations received and details not officially finalised,

(viii) perception of charter development in nine out of the ten centres as more of a bureaucratic exercise rather than one to help to improve programme and service quality.

For full benefit to be obtained, centres needed more time, less pressure, more advisory and resource support, and greater freedom to examine and articulate in their charters how they define quality and aim to provide it. Some of the introspection and firming up of philosophies occurring at the local association and national levels - but as a consequence of feeling threatened to move towards uniformity and conformity - was positive. This should have been happening more in the individual centres. The research literature demonstrates the importance of self-reflection, articulation of aims and programme processes, and self-evaluation, for ensuring that children do experience the kinds of benefits which services intend to provide.

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Presenter's Note:

The study was carried out with the assistance of Associate Professor Anne Smith and Dr Terry Crooks.

A copy of the full research report "Experiences of charter development in early childhood centres in 1990" is obtainable from the Research and Statistics Division, Ministry of Education, Private Box 1666, Wellington.

The project was featured on a video Education Update, No.6. produced by Learning Media, Ministry of Education, Wellington.

Ingredients of Child Care Education Quality which may be affected by Policy Decisions

PROTECT CHILDREN'S INTERESTS DEVELOPMENT

eChild Health
Hygiene policies & practices
Facilities for sick children
Physical needs met (food, adequate sleep, changing, potty/toilet, and washing facilities, ventilation, room temperature, etc)

Child Safety
Fenced area, off the road
Safe building (e.g. one storey for children under 3 yrs; safety plugs in electrical sockets)
Protection in case of emergencies (e.g. fire-proof doors, quick access to outdoors, strong building frame, established emergency procedures)
Constant adult supervision
Safe movement (e.g. clear pathways between areas, not cluttered; ease of access for children with physical disabilities)
Safe environment (e.g. soft surfaces under climbing objects; sandpits covered when not in use)

Child Happiness
Soft surfaces (e.g. grass to sit/ roll on, adults laps)
Sufficient toys and playthings
Sufficient space/not overcrowded

PROMOTE CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Adult-Child Ratio
Size of Children's Group
Mixed Age-Grouping
Trained Staff
Continuity in Staffing (low turnover)
Quality Activities (age stimulating, culturally and individually appropriate)
Programme with Educational Objectives
Parent Involvement (in programme and decision-making)
On-going Assessment and Evaluation (e.g. children's needs, quality of their experiences, goal assessment and evaluation, staff behaviour).

MACRO

Cultural (aspirations, goals, views & definition of good-quality)
Public - Feminist, Family, Business and Community (affordable, good choice of services, convenient hours and location, goals such as school preparation or second language teaching or, appropriate social role behaviour)
CCE Field - Staff Development, Professional Associations, Cohesion and Co-ordination between services (setting and monitoring of own standards, advocacy)

POLICY RECOGNITION THAT CCE IS A PUBLIC RESPONSIBILITY -> essential and strength of is increasingly important in the quest for higher quality CCE
MONEY-> increasingly important that there be no need trade-offs between quality and cost.
REGULATIONS TO ENSURE FLOOR OF QUALITY - > importance lessens when centres in compliance.
Danger of over-regulation to ensure uniform excellence at expense of special character.
TRADE-UNION LAWS -> protection and promotion of staff interests becomes more important
FISCAL MECHANISMS (accountability e.g. charters) becomes less important
PRE- & IN-SERVICE TRAINING (provision and quality) becomes more important

Some ingredients of good-quality which can't or may be indirectly affected by government policy: peer group stability, staff personality and quality of personal interactions/relations with children and families/staff/management, continuity in staffing through staff rosters).

Ingredients of Child Care Education Quality which may be affected by Industrial Awards

PROTECT CHILDREN'S INTERESTS **PROMOTE CHILD DEVELOPMENT** **MACRO DEVELOPMENT**

Child Health
(relieving staff available, staff sick day provisions, policy on staff health help e.g. vaccinations, lice checks)

Continuity of Care
(promote stability through job security; factors related to job satisfaction)

Trained Staff
(wages reflect training status and provide incentive for higher levels of training; financial assistance with costs and leave provisions)

Staff Effectiveness
(related to staff happiness, commitment to work, and recognition of the demands of their work - influenced by level of staff wages, fringe benefits, holiday and family and sick leave provisions, systems to prevent burnout such as joint staff-management meetings, provision of staff room, adequate meal and work breaks during the day, light duties when pregnant, etc)

Equity
(staff selection policy and insurance of non-discrimantion in staffing policies and management practices.

CCE Field Development
(wage equity across services; union membership which can provide opportunities to become more articulate of professional and field needs, and engage in advocacy of profession and status of child care education

Trained Staff are linked to other components of quality and particularly to:

(i) the level of parent involvement,

(ii) provision and choice of equipment and activities,

(iii) self-conscious practice, ability to use assessment and evaluation information to further programme quality.

Staff wages are probably the most important predictor of the quality of child care education, among the adult-work environment variables (See C. Gardiner, comments on this in his "Review of Early Childhood Funding: Independent Report", May 1991)